

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

1-14 (Canceled)

15. (Amended) A method of autonegotiating communication configuration information through a plurality of communication devices with a shared autonegotiation controller in a multiple channel communication system, the method comprising:

prior to initiating autonegotiation for a first of the plurality of communication devices, ceasing network communication to cause ~~the first of the~~ plurality of communication devices to recognize a link\_fail condition;

autonegotiating between the multiple channel communication system and the first of the plurality of communication devices;

determining whether a second of the plurality of communication devices changed status during autonegotiation of the first of the plurality of communication devices; and

autonegotiating between the multiple channel communication system and the second of the plurality of communication devices without ceasing network communication with the second of the plurality of communication devices if the status of the second of the plurality of network communication devices did not change during autonegotiation of the first of the plurality of network communication devices.

16. (Amended) The method of claim 15 wherein ~~the step of ceasing network inactivity—communication~~ comprises ceasing network communication for an interval corresponding to break\_link\_timer.

17.(Amended) The method of claim 16 wherein the duration of break\_link\_timer ~~comprises and is an~~ interval between approximately about 1200 milliseconds and approximately about 1500 milliseconds.

18.(Amended) A method of sequentially autonegotiating a plural number of ports with a shared autonegotiation controller, the method comprising:

steps for ~~sequentially autonegotiating the plural number of~~ ports; and

steps for initiating a break\_link\_timer a number of iterations that is less than the plural number of ports.

19.(Amended) A method for autonegotiating communication configuration information through a plurality of communication devices utilizing a shared autonegotiation controller, the method comprising:

ceasing network communication between a shared autonegotiation controller and a first network device in order to cause the first network device to recognize a link\_fail condition;

autonegotiating communication information between the autonegotiation controller and the first network device; and

selectively ceasing network communication between the autonegotiation controller and the second network device ~~based upon~~ due to a change of status of the second network device during autonegotiation of the first network device.